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Next 2 Page(s) In Document Denied

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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Operations of Groups and Bodies of Representatives of Cooperating Headquarters in a Front Offensive Operation

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Operations Groups and Bodies of Representatives of Cooperating Headquarters in a Front Offensive Operation

by

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An offensive operation of a front, the highest formation of the ground forces, conducted in the main theaters of military operations, is inconceivable without the efficient organization and continuous maintenance of coordination with the formations (large units) of other branches of the armed forces and also with the forces of the armies of friendly countries. Such coordination is organized, first of all, with strategic nuclear forces, forces of Air Defense of the Country, the navy, airborne troops, military-transport aviation, and various large units (formations), which might be incorporated directly into the front or assist in the fulfilment of the tasks confronting it.

To ensure coordination and continuous control over front troops, the need to establish an entire system of supplementing organs of control arises: operations groups, bodies of representatives, and auxiliary posts. Their establishment is dictated by the need for continuous personal contact between appropriate officers of the cooperating headquarters, by the need for more precise and rapid resolution of problems concerning joint combat actions, and also by the need for timely information on the condition and situation of the cooperating troops, the need to disseminate plans and reports (instructions) to the command, and the need for more substantive coordination on problems of the comprehensive support of actions of troops.

As has been shown by the experience of a number of exercises and war games, a front attacking on the main axis has to allocate up to 4 operations groups and 3 or 4 bodies of representatives to cooperating headquarters. Furthermore, when carrying out combat actions on a coastal axis, the need may arise to establish an auxiliary command post

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(VPU) in order to effect cooperation with the naval forces, especially when an amphibious landing is to be made. Depending on the tasks being fulfilled and their allocation to the groups and bodies, there may be 10 to 12 men in each operations group and 3 or 4 men in each body of representatives. Frequently these may be generals (officers) in charge of directorates (departments) of the front's field headquarters who have the suitable skills and experience in solving problems of cooperation and control of troops.

Frequently up to 65 generals and officers (not counting officers of the air army's headquarters), constituting approximately 13 percent of the personnel of the field headquarters of this formation, are allocated for the establishment of operations groups, bodies of representatives, and auxiliary command posts. At first glance it may seem that the involvement of such a number of generals and officers in the establishment of supplementary control organs should not seriously affect the stability of control over subordinate troops. In reality, this is not so at all.

The problem is that when supplementary organs are established in the required number and with the required personnel, the primary directorates (operations, intelligence, the chief of rocket troops and artillery) experience a great shortage of officers, which undoubtedly cannot but be reflected in the accomplishment of their tasks of providing continuous and firm control of troops. Up to one-third of the personnel of the primary directorates are called upon to man the supplementary organs.

For example, the number of operations and intelligence officers at the forward command post are reduced to half the usual number; the deputy chief of staff is often required to direct the work of this post in place of the deputy commander of troops of the front. To a considerable degree the rear command post of the front also turns out to be weakened.

Operational training practice has shown that in order to provide firm control over front troops from any command post, it is necessary to have, as a minimum, 18 to 20 officers from the operations directorate and 10 to 12

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50X1-HUM

officers from the intelligence directorate. Under the conditions being discussed, this requirement also cannot be satisfied.

The contradiction which has arisen between the limited capabilities of establishing supplementary control organs and the necessity of allocating them to ensure coordination can be solved, in our opinion, by implementing a number of measures.

First, it seems to us, the solution of this problem may be achieved (if the situation permits) by reducing the number of operations groups and transferring their functions to the bodies of representatives. In this case, less personnel will have to be allocated to the supplementary control organs, but in truth, in this case the quality of coordination provided may be lowered to some degree.

Second, considering the operational assignment of a particular front, it is obviously advisable to include beforehand a number of operations groups in the table of organization of the headquarters of the given front. For example, it would be desirable to have in the table of organization of a front operating on a coastal axis an operations group to coordinate with the navy. A front which has in its composition formations from the armies of the Warsaw Pact countries should also have at its disposal special operations groups and bodies of representatives to coordinate with the general (main) staffs and formations of these countries.

As has been already remarked in the press,* to achieve continuous control of the troops of a front requires the establishment of a reserve command (reserve command post), which first of all has to be earmarked to replace command posts which have been put out of action or provide replacement personnel for command posts which have suffered heavy casualties. We are convinced that a portion of the forces and means of such a command (post) can be used to establish operations groups and bodies of representatives to fulfil the tasks of providing coordination.

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* Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", 1969, No. 1 (86).

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Speaking about the important role of the supplementary organs of control, we cannot but remark that the effectiveness of their work is utterly dependent on the availability to them of the suitable means of communications. At the same time, as has been confirmed by exercise experience, the capabilities of providing necessary means of communications to the supplementary organs of control are extremely limited. Thus, in the exercises carried out, these means have often been provided to only half of the designated operations groups. The remaining groups and bodies of representatives have been obliged to make use of the means of communications of the formations at whose command posts they arrive. This indisputably hampers the work of the additionally created organs, fetters initiative, and makes their work dependent on the capabilities of the means of control of subordinate and cooperating headquarters.

To solve the problem indicated it will be necessary to procure suitable means of communications at the expense of the reserves or of the additional forces and means of higher echelons in order to provide them at least to the operations groups.

We also do not exclude a variant whereby a specific reserve of communications means is to be established at the command posts of the cooperating troops and earmarked for the support of the operations groups (bodies of representatives) which arrive from other headquarters. For example, at the fleet's command post there can be communications means for the operations group of the front, and contrariwise, at the front command post, communications means can be allotted in advance for the fleet's operations group. In this case, the maneuverability and mobility of the operations groups will be increased and more reliable communications with their own headquarters will be guaranteed.

A solution is also required for the problem of providing reliable communications for the operations group detailed by the front headquarters for coordination with a large-scale airborne assault force. As is known, its landing area may be up to 800 kilometers away from first-echelon troops of the front. Hence, the radio means

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50X1-HUM

allotted to such an operations group should fit the requirements for the establishment of communications over considerable distances. Furthermore, in size and other tactical-technical characteristics, these means should be air-transportable.

It is well known that to provide close coordination with a front, operations groups (bodies of representatives, command posts) will be dispatched on the principle of reciprocity from the headquarters of branches of the armed forces, from the headquarters of formations of other nationalities, and from other organs. In this connection, the problems of the method of locating these organs and of ensuring their survivability are also worthy of attention.

It is an accepted view that operations groups (bodies of representatives) that arrive from cooperating headquarters, and also the forward command posts of airborne troops and military-transport aviation, should be located right at the front command post. This is convenient from the point of view of having the organs mentioned establish close contact with officers of the front by means of personal contact. However, this locating also has significant negative aspects which affect the survivability of the organs dispatched, and hence also affect the stability of coordination.

Concentrating control organs of cooperating headquarters in the area of the front command post creates conditions which may result in having them simultaneously put out of action if the enemy delivers nuclear strikes against the command post of the formation. In this case, undoubtedly, the system established to assure coordination will be broken.

This opinion was borne out by the experience of one of the exercises when, during a front offensive operation, the front command post and the control organs of cooperating headquarters located at it were destroyed by enemy nuclear strikes. In the situation that then developed, control over the troops was assumed by the forward command post, which was able, to some extent or other, to fulfil the primary functions of a command post. As concerns cooperation with

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the headquarters mentioned above, this had to be organized anew, since the forward command post did not have the suitable forces and means for this. Naturally, re-establishing the coordination that had been lost required considerable time. This occurred, first of all, because feasible measures to raise the stability of coordination were not adopted ahead of time and because the procedure for re-establishing it in case it were broken was not worked out.

Stemming from what has been set forth, it is obvious that to ensure continuous coordination, particularly during an operation, with the headquarters of branches of the armed forces, formations of other nationalities, and general (main) staffs of friendly countries, it is advisable that control organs arriving from them be located, not in the area of the front command post, but some distance away from it, so that a single nuclear strike cannot destroy their main elements. Calculations show that these requirements can be fulfilled by separating the indicated control organs of cooperating headquarters from the main groups of the front command post by a distance of 10 to 12 kilometers.

Furthermore, it is obviously advisable to divide into two parts the control organs that arrive; one of these parts should be located at the front command post and the other should be either at the command post earmarked to replace the command post or else in reserve.

In conclusion, we must emphasize that the allocation of operations groups and bodies of representatives to the appropriate headquarters permits a considerable increase in the effectiveness of cooperation of troops, particularly that of groupings composed of coalition forces. At the same time, establishing these groups in the required numbers will give rise to the need for some changes in the organizational and staffing structure of control organs.

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